

THE FUTURE OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT POLICIES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION IN THE POST-COVID19 PERIOD

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The Covid19 pandemic, which has severely affected the world in economic and social terms for over a year, infected more than 92 million people worldwide as of January 2021, causing approximately 2 million people to die (WHO, Covid19 Dashboard). Regions that can produce and respond with strategies in the fastest and most effective way in crisis situations such as suddenly developing global epidemic cases that disrupt the value chains on a global scale and prevent the efficient and effective operation of production and consumption networks can continue to maintain their competitive advantages. The dominant effects of global economy and globalization will continue to exist in the post-Covid19 period, but there will be winners and losers in the face of these new conditions. So, how should regions and city networks develop and strengthen themselves in order to remain on the winners' side? Is it necessary to re-examine regional development policies in the post-Covid19 period?

As part of the reconstruction of countries after the Second World War, it was aimed that both local and regional levels contribute to national development, and regional development approach became important. Scientific research in this policy area also seems to have intensified during this period. Since the 1980s, under the influence of neoliberalism, governments have started to move away from the planning approach. A global economic order in which goods, capital and services flow freely became dominant paradigm. In addition to this framework, information has begun to circulate rapidly and freely over the past 20 years. In the information age, big data, automation and smart systems gained more speed and became dominant. Therefore, regional development approaches should also be reviewed within this framework.

During the corona virus period, it has been well understood that the world is now shaped in every field around the axis of information technologies. All possible services are transferred to online systems. Even the mass production factories are transferred into fully automated systems; evolving towards less labor dependent production. In this period, the cargo and logistics sectors also gained importance. People no longer have to live squeezed in big metropolitan areas. In fact, in terms of a healthy life, densely populated areas have started to be seen as harmful. People prefer settlements with less population density and with gardens. Business environments become more flexible, and if possible, work in home offices. This situation results in the creation of production and consumption structures at the regional scale by spreading to the outer settlements of the densely populated city centers.

In public administration, instead of the top-down planning approach during the 1950s, more participatory, bottom-up, transparent, accountable, governance approaches became more popular. It has been observed that when social and economic problems are left on their own, appropriate solutions cannot be produced for the

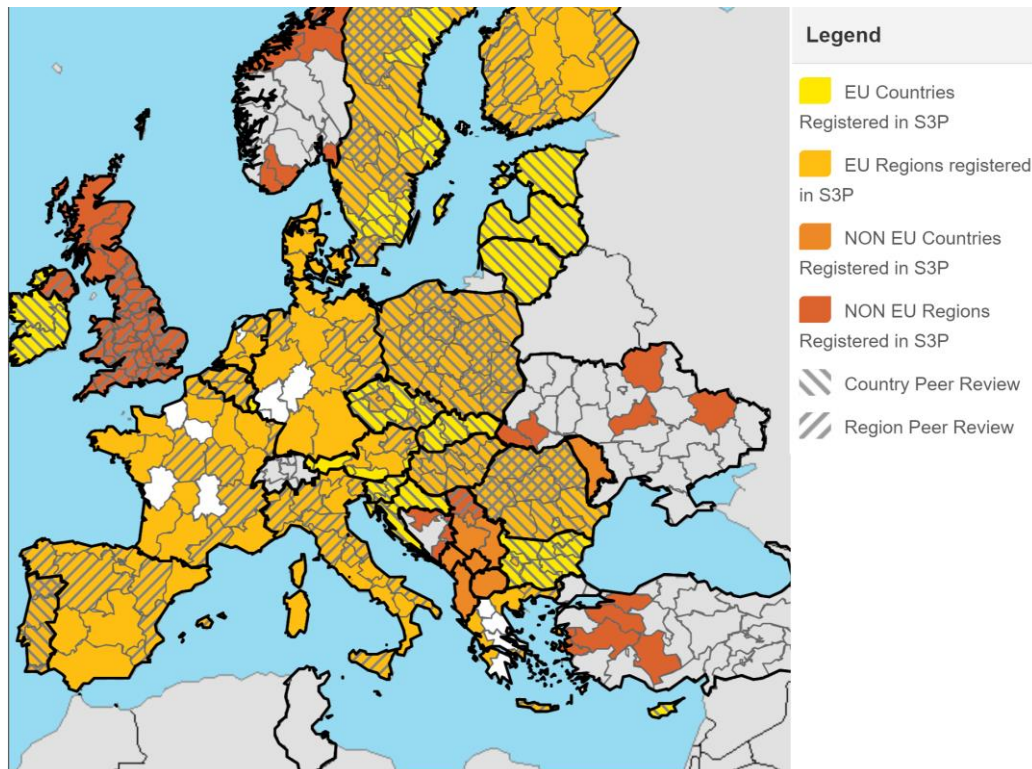
problems within the market mechanism. Likewise, it has been observed that excessive interventions made with the Keynesian approach create inefficiency in the long term. For this reason, the planning but participatory, bottom-up governance approach stands out among the practitioners and theorists.

From the regional development point of view if the European Union and Turkey samples are taken into consideration it is seen that this type of organizational structures have become widespread. As an example of these structures, the map below contains information about regional development agencies operating in Europe (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1 – EURADA Member Map

Within the framework of the smart specialization strategy coordinated by the European Commission and developed mostly by regional development agencies, it is seen that innovation strategies based on smart specialization have been created in almost all EU member regions, and some steps have been taken in this direction by non-member countries.



The economic and social damage that occurred during the corona period also shows the necessity of a developmental approach similar to that of a post-war to overcome this. However, this time, solutions should be addressed with an approach based on IT and health rather than building and construction. Regions should put forward innovation-based, R&D-based development axes and self-improving, learning social structures that support them. Thus, more livable and environmentally sustainable regions can be created for people.

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